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Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur lead the ground breaking for the new Visitor Center at the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge. Kaptur secured \$1.95 million for construction of the education and welcome center and \$600,000 for additional land acquisition for the Refuge in the 2003 Omnibus Appropriations bill. Kaptur submitted a commemorative letter to the Centennial Time Capsule to celebrate the Centennial Anniversary of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Kaptur, a senior member of the powerful House Appropriations Committee, noted that the Refuge attracts more than 120,000 visitors annually and pumps more than \$5 million a year into the local economy. More than 10 million people live within a two hours' drive of the refuge. Kaptur's comments at the ceremony follow: It is indeed an honor to be a part of the Ceremonial Interment of the Centennial Time Capsule and Visitor Center Ground Breaking Ceremony at the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge today. The Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge is of enormous importance to our community, opening the wonders of Lake Erie wildlife to literally millions of schoolchildren and families.

During this centennial year of the national wildlife refuge system, the Ottawa Refuge is clearly on the move. It is expanding its borders and building a Visitor Center, raising the profile of the refuge dramatically while keeping intact its mission of preservation and conservation.

As we break ground today for a new Welcome and Visitor Center at the Ottawa Wildlife Refuge we are mindful that we make an investment in the future of ecotourism in our region at the same time as we polish the jewel that is our State's only national refuge complex. The Ottawa Refuge is a key gem in the beautiful emerald necklace around the western basin of Lake Erie. This education center will draw thousands upon thousands of visitors and provide a welcome boost to the local economy. The Refuge is essential to sustain and enhance the quality of life of those living along Lake Erie.

Today, we thank the staff of the Refuge and its citizen partners in the Friends of the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge organization, for all you have done to help make this day a reality. Your foresight and commitment to the preservation and improvement of this fine jewel on the National Refuge System is indeed a gift to those who will follow us on this land.